

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01  
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15  
ICA-11 TRSE-00 OMB-01 SPTA-02 /084 W  
-----086254 032319Z /75

P 032236Z AUG 78  
FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8289  
INFO PANCANAL  
USSOUTHCOM  
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR  
AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PANAMA 05623

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, PN  
SUBJECT: ONLY TWO DAYS MORE 'TIL ELECTION DAY

REF: PANAMA 5145

SUMMARY: PANAMA IS GEARING UP FOR THE AUGUST 6 ELECTIONS FOR ITS COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES, THE LOCAL OFFICIALS MAKING UP THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS ARE ON A PROLONGED SEMESTER BREAK, OSTENSIBLY SO THEY CAN BE READIED TO SERVE AT POLLING PLACES, BUT MORE LIKELY IN THE HOPE THAT POTENILALLY DISRUPTIVE STUDENT AGITATION WILL BE AVOIDED. UNIVERSITY RECTORS FROM THE U.S. AND LATIN AMERICA HAVE BEGUN ARRIVING TO ACT AS "OBSERVERS" OF THE ELECTIONS. ONE OF THE THREE OAS-DESIGNATED OBSERVERS HAS COME UNDER ATTACK FOR PARTICIPATION IN ALLEGEDLY FRAUDULENT ELECTIONS IN HIS OWN COUNTRY. GOVERNMENT-BACKED CANDIDATES ARE ALMOST SURE TO WIN, BUT IN ANY CASE, THE MORE SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT CONTINUES TO BE THE INSTITUTION OF POLITICAL REFORMS WHICH TORRIJOS

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HAS BEEN SUGGESTING. END SUMMARY

1. WITH THE AUGUST 6 ELECTIONS FOR COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES JUST A COUPLE OF DAYS OFF, PANAMA IS GEARING UP FOR THE EVENT AND THE GOVERNMENT IS BENDING OVER BACKWARDS TO PUT A GOOD FACE ON IT.

-- PUBLICITY IS BEING GIVEN TO THE PROSECUTION OF  
ALLEGED ELECTORAL LAW VIOLATIONS.

-- VOTING INSTRUCTIONS ARE CIRCULATING, AND REGULATIONS  
HAVE BEEN ISSUED GOVERNING THE WEEK-END'S ACTIVITIES.  
FOR EXAMPLE, POLITICKING FOR ONE CANDIDATE OR ANOTHER  
IS TO CEASE DURING THE WEEK-END, AND THE SALE OF  
ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES IS PROHIBITED ON ELECTION DAY.

-- TO AVOID VOTER MANIPULATION, THE ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL  
HAS REQUESTED THAT A NUMBER OF STEPS BE TAKEN,  
PRIMARILY THAT PUBLIC OFFICIALS (POLICE MAGISTRATES  
AND DISTRICT ATTORNEYS) BE ROTATED OUT OF THEIR  
IMMEDIATE AREAS TO REDUCE THE POSSIBILITY OF THEIR  
EXERTING UNDUE INFLUENCE ON VOTERS.

-- THE NATIONAL GUARD HAS ALSO BEEN ASKED TO PROHIBIT THE  
TRANSIT OF VEHICLES CARRYING VOTERS FROM ONE DISTRICT  
TO ANOTHER. SUPPOSEDLY, NORMAL TRANSPORTATION  
ACTIVITIES WILL NOT BE DISRUPTED, BUT THOSE TRAVELING  
WILL HAVE TO BE ABLE TO SHOW THAT THEY HAVE ALREADY  
VOTED (BY MEANS OF THE SPECIAL PERFORATION TO MADE  
IN THEIR IDENTIFICATION CARDS AFTER VOTING).

2. NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS ARE BEING SET UP AS POLLING  
PLACES. SEVERAL WEEKS AGO THE GOVERNMENT WENT THROUGH AN  
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ELABORATE PROCESS OF REVISING THE SCHOOL CALENDAR SO THAT  
SCHOOL WOULD BE IN SESSION AT ELECTION TIME AND TEACHERS,  
WHO WILL BE REQUIRED TO ASSIST IN THE VOTING PROCESS,  
WOULD NOT HAVE THEIR VACATIONS INTERRUPTED. SUBSEQUENTLY,  
THE GOVERNMENT REVERSED ITSELF, REVISED THE CALENDAR A  
SECOND TIME AND PUT THE SCHOOLS ON A PROLONGED SEMESTER  
BREAK. OSTENSIBLY, THIS WAS DONE SO THAT THE SCHOOLS  
COULD BE READIED AS POLLING PLACES, BUT THE MORE LIKELY  
EXPLANATION IS THE HOPE THAT THE POTENTIAL FOR DISRUPTIVE  
STUDENT AGITATION -- WHETHER DIRECTED AGAINST THE  
ELECTIONS THEMSELVES OR RELATED TO DISSATISFACTION WITH  
SCHOOL CONDITIONS -- CAN THUS BE REDUCED.

3. A BEVY OF INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS HAS BEGUN TO ARRIVE  
ON THE SCENE AT THE INVITATION OF THE GOVERNMENT.  
UNIVERSITY OFFICIALS FROM SOME 13 LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES  
AND THE U.S. (THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AND THE  
UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI ARE REPRESENTED AS OF THIS WRITING)  
WILL PARTICIPATE AS WILL THE THREE OAS-DESIGNATED  
OBSERVERS, FORMER PRESIDENTS OF PERU AND EL SALVADOR AND  
AN EX-FOREIGN MINISTER OF ARGENTINA. AS WAS THE PRACTICE  
AT THE TIME OF THE OCTOBER 1977 CANAL TREATY PLEBISCITE,

THE OBSERVERS WILL BE DIVIDED INTO GROUPS AND TAKEN  
THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY TO DO THEIR DUTY.

4. THE DESIGNATION OF THE SALVADORAN, COL. ARTURO MOLINA,  
HAS BEEN PROTESTED BY THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE SOCIETY  
OF JESUS (THE JESUITS), WHICH REQUESTED THE OAS TO WITHDRAW  
MOLINA'S NAME. THE COUNCIL'S JULY 30 LETTER TO OAS  
SECRETARY-GENERAL ORFILA, IN WHICH MOLINA WAS ACCUSED OF  
INVOLVEMENT IN ELECTION FRAUD IN HIS OWN COUNTRY AND OF  
HAVING TOLERATED PERSECUTION OF THE PEASANTS AND OF THE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 PANAMA 05623

CATHOLIC CHURCH IN EL SALVADOR, WAS CARRIED IN THE LOCAL  
PRESS. THE GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA HAS NOT ADDRESSED THE  
THE ALLEGATIONS SPECIFICALLY, BUT, BEAUTY BEING IN THE EYE  
OF THE BEHOLDER, MOLINA HAS BEEN TOUTED IN THE PRESS AS AN  
"HONEST, JUST, AND LOYAL" INDIVIDUAL.

5. WE EMPHASIZE THAT THESE ELECTIONS ARE ESSENTIALLY  
LOCAL. COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES ARE LOCAL OFFICIALS, WHO  
FOR A FEW DAYS EACH YEAR ALSO SERVE IN A VIRTUALLY POWERLESS  
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. THEY DO ELECT THE PRESIDENT, BUT IT IS  
A FOREGONE CONCLUSION THAT TORRIJOS' WISHES WILL BE THE  
WISHES OF THE ASSEMBLY ON THAT QUESTION. NEITHER THE  
PARTIES NOR ANY OTHER BODY HAS ORGANIZED SLATES, SO IT WILL  
BE IMPOSSIBLE TO REPORT WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT HAS "WON" OR  
"LOST". ISSUES, INsofar AS THEY EXIST AT ALL, ARE ALMOST  
EXCLUSIVELY LOCAL. MOST OF THE CANDIDATES SEEM TO BE

NEITHER ANTI- NOR EXCESSIVELY PRO-GOVERNMENT, BUT ARE  
SIMPLY TRYING TO STAY IN GOOD WITH THE POWERS THAT BE.  
SINCE PANAMA'S SYSTEM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IS CENTRALIZED,  
THE NEW REPRESENTATIVES MIGHT FIND THEMSELVES OUT IN THE  
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COLD WHEN THE GOVERNMENT'S GOODIES ARE PASSED AROUND OVER  
THE NEXT SIX YEARS IF THEY WERE TO GET TOO FAR OUT OF LINE.

6. THE EMBASSY DOES NOT FORESEE ANYTHING BUT A QUIET  
ELECTION. ALTHOUGH BLATANT FRAUD PROBABLY WILL NOT OCCUR  
TO A SIGNIFICANT DEGREE, THE CANDIDATES FAVORED BY THE  
GOVERNMENT HAVE ENOUGH GOING FOR THEM -- INDIRECT GOVERN-  
MENT SUPPORT OF THEIR CAMPAIGNS, THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THEY  
WILL BE BETTER ABLE TO GET ALONG WITH THE ALL-POWERFUL  
CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, AND SOME GOVERNMENT TOLERATION OF  
DUBIOUS CAMPAIGN PRACTICES -- THAT THEY STAND A POOR  
CHANCE OF LOSING. REGARDLESS OF THE ELECTION RESULTS,  
HOWEVER, WE REITERATE THAT THE MORE IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENT  
IN TERMS OF NATIONAL POLITICS WILL BE THE INSTITUTION OF  
REFORMS (PANAMA 5130 AND PREVIOUS) WHICH TORRIJOS HAS BEEN  
SUGGESTING DURING THE LAST SEVERAL MONTHS. JORDEN

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## Message Attributes

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**Subject:** ONLY TWO DAYS MORE 'TIL ELECTION DAY  
**TAGS:** PINT, PN  
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